

To the Readers

As we reach the end of 2015, five hundred years have gone by since the death of Aldus Manutius, the major humanist of the Renaissance who dedicated his life to the dissemination of Classical Greek and Byzantine literature, since he firmly believed that no humanist education was possible without knowledge of the Greek language. Based in Venice, city of the Doges, Aldus worked tirelessly and with prodigious zeal from 1494 to 1515, in order to offer the humanist public of Venice and Northern Europe reliable first editions of Greek texts, several of which were until that time unknown to the West.

In the past two centuries, scholars and historians have almost exhaustively studied the logic of Aldus's publishing project, the reliability of his editions and the role of his Greek and Italian collaborators and of all those who supported him financially and politically in a variety of ways; the owners of major manuscript collections who entrusted their treasures to him, his relatives and those who carried on his vision after his death. However, what has not been sufficiently appraised is the contribution of his Greek collaborators, mainly the Cretans, without whom this feat, that is, the edition of Greek books at that particular time, would have been impossible. Aldus never hid this fact, instead he spoke of his helpers on every occasion, in the dedicatory prefaces to his editions.

An essential prerequisite for the philological preparation of the texts to be published, especially those about to be printed by his press for the first time ever, such as the five-volume edition of Aristotle's Complete Works, and Plato's Dialogues, was the possibility to access large collections of books, kept in Venice as well as in other centres of Italy, such as Padua and Ferrara. For example, the unique collection of cardinal Bessarion with its highly reliable ancient codices, which had been passed down to the Republic of Venice several years before, the rich libraries of the Hellenist Giorgio Valla, Niccoló Leonicensino of Ferrara, Alberto Pio, prince of Carpi and that of Aldus's close collaborator, Marcus Musurus, constituted indispensable sources for Aldus's editions. Aldus's objective was not only to find and publish hitherto unknown texts; he also wished to be able to collate manuscripts in order to produce reliable editions.

I believe that we all should honour Aldus's memory, and at the same time keep in mind the part played by his Greek collaborators in this gigantic publishing project. Even more so since several of his first editions consist in major works of ancient Greek literature such as the texts of Plato, Aristotle and the scholiasts of the Stagirite philosopher –Alexander of Aphrodisias and Ammonius Hermiae– alongside with the plays of the great tragic poets Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides and naturally Homer's epics and the didactic poems of Hesiod.

However, it is not possible to make an overall appraisal of Aldus's editorial endeavour, or even of his Greek editions only, without access to the original editions and to the whole of earlier and recent scholarly work on related subjects. In addition, Aldus's work and his

entrepreneurial activity have been approached from diverse standpoints. For example, there has been exhaustive bibliographical recording of his Greek and Latin editions, and his invaluable Prefaces have been translated and commented upon; also, the families of typeface used in every occasion, as well as the different versions of his printer's device have been identified. However, the aesthetics of Aldus's Greek books, especially the incunabula, in comparison with the Latin editions have not been sufficiently appraised.

Aldus Manutius's contribution to the propagation of Greek and Roman culture and Renaissance humanism cannot of course be grasped by studying his editions alone. Subsequent to their publishing, these books became tools of learning in the University circles and had drastic influence on the evolution of European thought from the Renaissance onwards.

K. SP. STAIKOS